

TexasMonthly

THE **50** BEST  
**BBQ**  
**JOINTS**

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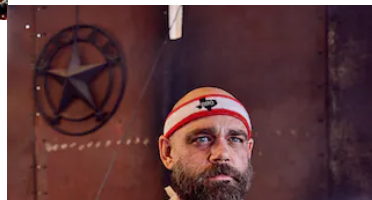


↑ **BACK TO TOP**

There's a new generation of Texas pitmasters in town,  
many of whom aren't satisfied with doing things the same

THE  
**MEAT**  
MAP

old way. (Though fear not, staunch traditionalists: many are.)



**J**

ust a decade ago, Texans took our state's basic barbecue meal for granted. It was the sacred trinity of brisket, pork spareribs, and sausage, served with potato salad, coleslaw, and beans on the side. The biggest decision diners had to make was whether they wanted ice cream with their peach cobbler. The lineup seemed as fixed as the brick barbecue pits in which the meats were smoked.

And it wasn't just the menu that was unchanging. Places and personalities seemed perennial as well. Two of the many truths we held to be self-evident were these: Lockhart was the unchallenged capital of Texas barbecue, and Snow's BBQ, in Lexington, and Franklin Barbecue, in Austin, were the best joints in the state. That pair of enormously admired institutions captured the number one and two spots on *Texas Monthly's* 2013 and 2017 lists of the fifty best barbecue joints (Snow's also ranked first in 2008, before Franklin opened). They epitomized old-school Texas barbecue at its finest. Aspiring and veteran pitmasters alike visited them as if they were shrines.

But in the past half decade or so, we've begun to notice that the winds of change are blowing.



**BACK TO TOP**

**THE MEAT MAP**

growing quite gusty. In cities and towns across the state, new joints have been opening, and young, ambitious pitmasters have been getting into the game. Because they've been inspired by Texas's long and storied barbecue tradition, the Texas trinity still dominates, and brisket has only gotten more popular (and expensive). That said, the upstarts have lots of new ideas.

What distinguishes the Texas barbecue scene today? In a word: surprises. In another word: variety. We're talking bacon burnt ends, beef cheeks, birria, blueberry-and-Gouda sausage, brisket-topped elote, and guava-glazed pork ribs. And those are just the meat offerings. Side dishes and desserts range as far afield as Big Red tres leches cake, blistered brussels sprouts, carrot soufflé, citrus-beet salad, and brisket fried rice. And we haven't even gotten to the wine lists.

As you would expect at a time of transformation, compiling our Top 50 list was a challenge. Even we were shocked by some of the changes we felt compelled to make. The former lodestars in our firmament, Snow's and Franklin, no longer occupy our first or second spots (though both made the top ten and are absolutely worth visiting). For the first time, sadly, no Lockhart joints made the list (though the venerated Kreuz Market does appear in our **Honorable Mentions**). But the flip side of those descents is that Texas barbecue boasts an exciting freshman class: 29 of the 50 entries are new to the list, including the rookie establishment that vaulted to our number one spot.

In short, if you were hoping for an argument that innovation is getting out of hand and it's time to retrench and return to the simpler days of barbecue, you won't find it here. But have no fear: if you're an old-school stalwart who blanches at the thought of smoked cauliflower, plenty of places on our list will make you very happy.

Is Texas barbecue losing its soul, as some might fear? No. The staples aren't going anywhere, and the rising generation of pitmasters prepares them as well as—and often better than—anyone ever has. The up-and-comers aren't erasing anything; they're adding to what we have and paying tribute to our culinary heritage by reinvigorating it.

Welcome to the brave new era of Texas barbecue. The best is yet to come.

#### HOW WE DID IT

To compile this year's list, **32 Texas Monthly** editorial staffers and 3 freelancers visited **411 barbecue joints** over eight weeks during the spring and summer, driving **many thousands of miles** in the process.

The most promising candidates were then revisited by either barbecue

**THE  
MEAT  
MAP**

 **BACK TO TOP**

The most promising candidates were then reviewed by either restaurant editor Daniel Vaughn or food writer Patricia Sharpe, or both, to determine the top ten. Visits were not announced in advance, and *Texas Monthly* paid for all the food. This is our **sixth Top 50 list** since 1997.

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Fort Worth

**Panther City**

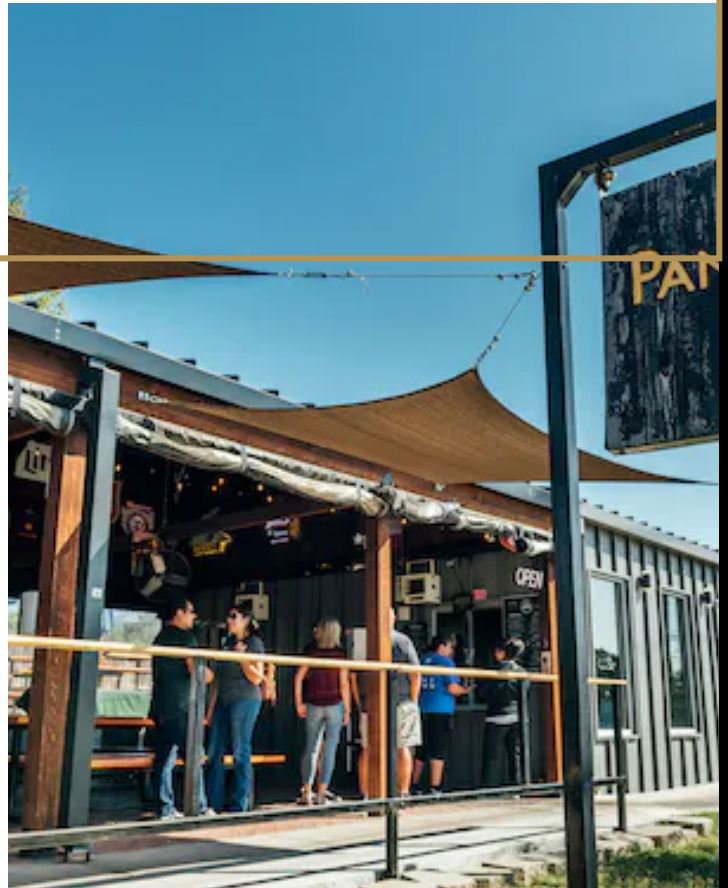
BBQ



BACK TO TOP

THE  
MEAT  
MAP





A tray of barbecue; Ernest Morales and Chris Magallanes; the exterior.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARTURO OLMOS

## Frisco

# Hutchins BBQ

**OPENED:** 2014

**PITMASTER:** Tim Hutchins, 41; Trey Hutchins, 50; John Mueller, 52

**METHOD:** Oak and pecan; wood-fired rotisserie smoker

**PRO TIP:** Try the Texas Twinkie, a stuffed jalapeño that inspired the similarly delicious one at Arlington's Hurtado Barbecue.

The sides steal the show at the Frisco location of Hutchins BBQ (the original opened in 1978, in Princeton, under a different name, then moved to McKinney). They include garlicky mashed potatoes, bacon-infused mac and cheese, and pinto beans that taste like brisket soup. But the folks in the sometimes very long line are there for the Hutchins brothers' smoked meat, which includes some of the best chicken and sausage in the state; fatty, flavorful burnt ends; and beef ribs. John Mueller, a member of barbecue royalty, recently joined the team.

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9225 Preston Rd, Frisco; **972-377-2046**; Daily 11–9 or sold out; [hutchinsbbq.com](http://hutchinsbbq.com)

## Gonzales

# Baker Boys BBQ

**OPENED:** 2015

**PITMASTER:** Phil Baker, 69; Wayne Baker, 40

**METHOD:** Charcoal briquettes; indirect-heat pit

**PRO TIP:** Get the chocolate meringue pie chilled, not at room temperature.



The highlights among the side dishes were the smoked-cheddar-and-Gouda mac and cheese and the collard greens. A family-recipe banana pudding was decadently creamy—we would have gone back for more if we hadn't already stuffed ourselves silly.

8532 N. Texas Hwy 6, Woodway; **254-848-8200**; Wed & Thur 11–7, Fri & Sat 11–8, Sun 10–2 or sold out; [helbergbarbecue.com](https://www.helbergbarbecue.com)



## THE NEXT FIFTY

Our Honorable Mentions. Yes, there are at least 100 very good joints in Texas.

**STILL HUNGRY?**

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